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LONG LIFE TO ALEXANDER W. EVANS

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In RHODORA, li. 178 (1949), I made a most embarrassing error. Referring to the conscientious editing by the late Charles A. Weatherby of papers sent in for publication, I commented on "those of the late Alexander W. Evans . . . who wrote unexcelled English". Momentarily pleased to have had such a painstaking contributor to the pages of RHODORA, I neglected to verify the statement of my informant, for it had been some time since I had had the satisfaction of handling one of Evans's manuscripts. Now, botanists, returning from the Christmas-week meetings at New York, report the presence there in vigorous health and with an amused laugh over the incident, of Evans, so alert and active that I am reminded of the day (August 7, 1917) when he and I tried to keep up with the lithe and slender Stanley Pease in climbing the vertical and slippery walls of Huntington's Ravine in the White Mountains. Evans, apparently, could still keep up; I certainly could not. I am, therefore, most happy to assert on the best of authority that, now past four-score, Evans is very much alive.

Whether the same can be said for the unwitting slanderer is another question. At any rate, a recent letter, received at the Gray Herbarium, expresses regret at the news, trickling through from New York, of the death of Fernald. As he has been assured, others have reasoned, because he was absent from the meetings, that he was no longer up to "manual labor". But Manual-labor was exactly what he was "up to" at that period (as for months past): rereading twelve hours a day the page-

proofs of the Manual and noting so many pranks of the printer's devil¹ as often to "wish he were dead". Certainly, his blunder was a boomerang!

There is special interest to me and the Harvard men of my period about the age, four-score plus. In our undergraduate days every student, whether of fine arts, the classics or the natural sciences, took, if he could get into the room, Shaler's "Geology 4", not because of the geology, which was a thin background, but because of Shaler's dramatic presentation and perpetual diversions into all fields of worldly wisdom. At the special lecture I refer to he suddenly stopped, then proceeded. "GENTLEMEN: Did you ever notice how those who follow literature or art soon tire and have nothing to absorb them in their later years, while students of Nature, whether geology or natural history, have a life-long interest and greatly outlive their literary and artistic friends?" That thesis has stuck with me and many others and I have been interested, in odd moments, to make a check of the active workers (at least before some of them specialized in the lower groups), whether in the herbarium or out-of-doors (when they stored up what would now be called "sunshine vitamins") in my own field, taxonomy of vascular plants. One could start with Theophrastus but I have contented myself with active Americans or workers in temperate North America (thus excluding Humboldt, 90, and others in tropical America). Briefly tabulated and noting only about sixty out of hundreds we get lists for the past such as the following (some, as above noted, later concentrating outside the vascular plants):

LIVING TO 83 YEARS: William D. Brackenridge, Addison Brown, John Carey, Edwin H. Eames, Joseph T. Rothrock, Charles W. Swan, David Thomas; TO 84 YEARS: William Bartram, John M. Bates, George B. Emerson, Fayette F. Forbes, Ellsworth J. Hill, Leo Lesquereux, Lewis H. Lighthipe, Charles H. Peck, Carl Purdy, William W. Wister; TO 85 YEARS: Joseph Barratt, Charles D. Lippincott, François André Michaux, John C. Parlin, Henry H. Rusby, William Trimble, Richard W. Woodward; TO 86 YEARS: Florence Beckwith, Thomas H. Macbride, Alfred Rehder, Charles S. Sargent; TO 87 YEARS: John Clayton, Robert I. Cratty, James Hall, Joachim H. Schuette, Frank Lamson-Scribner; TO 88 YEARS: Joseph R. Churchill, John G. Jack, John M. Macfarlane, John Macoun, Archibald

¹ For instance, altering (after the galley-proofs) such an expression as "flowering stems arising from the slender tips of past year's stolons" so that the last words read: "the slender tips of past year's solons", whereupon I was asked if that were my impression of retired lawmakers.

Menzies, Albert Ruth, William Trelease; to **89** YEARS: James H. Carruth, Louis F. Henderson, Robert Peter, Robert A. Ware; to **90** YEARS: Alvan W. Chapman, Albert Commons, Samuel B. Parish; to **91** YEARS: William J. Beal, Eliphalet W. Hervey; to **92** YEARS: Joseph C. Arthur, Jacob Bigelow, Herbert M. Denslow, Henry Detwiller, John Mitchell, Edward S. Steele; to **93** YEARS: John Goldie, Alexander Prior; to **94** YEARS: James Fowler; to **96** YEARS: John W. Dunlop; to **97** YEARS: Kate Furbish; to **99** YEARS: Edo Claassen, John Donnell Smith.

An even more inspiring group, at least to us youngsters, is that bevy of active workers now with us, such leaders as

Otto F. Cook (83), Jesse More Greenman (83), Chauncey D. Beadle (84), Nils E. Hansen (84), Jared G. Smith (84), Charles C. Deam (85), Cornelius L. Shear (85), Ivar Tidestrom (85), Ernest C. Smith (86), Anna Murray Vail (87), Alice Eastwood (91), L. H. Bailey (92), Charles F. Batchelder (94), John Dearness (98).¹

Rather strikingly, the century-mark seems to be rarely attained. Of the active North American workers in this limited field I know of none who have come nearer than Edo Claassen and John Donnell Smith. In Europe it has been attained almost as rarely. As notable a near-centennarian as any is HERMANN CHRIST (99 years, 11 months), the great Swiss pteridologist. Early members of the New England Botanical Club will never forget his name. The late George E. Davenport, a very painstaking and accurate student of ferns, was temperamentally not given to humor. At one meeting, reviewing the "rude" and "insulting" remarks regarding his work published by a student (who later committed suicide) at an institution outside New England, he said, with tears in his voice: "I have stood these insults as long as I can. Finally, I referred the matter to Christ (pronouncing the vowel as if it were a long *i* in English). He has just sent me his reply, in which he highly approves my judgment."

In view of the evident truth of Shaler's thesis and the greatly lengthened "life-expectancy" of the present over past generations we all look forward with confidence and keen interest to the future studies² of Alexander Evans and his elders in the botanical field.

¹ If others wish to enroll in this highly honored group a note to that effect will be greatly appreciated.

² Like the 60-page manuscript and the plate received from Evans as this is sent for paging!